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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the current status of a helping skills program designed to train mental health paraprofessionals in relationship-building skills. Six skills were identified as the basis of the training program: (1) understanding the need to be a helper; (2) using effective nonverbal behavior; (3) using effective verbal behavior; (4) using effective self-involving behavior; (5) understanding others' communication; and (6) establishing effective helping relationships. The process of skill training involved defining and rationalizing the skill in behavioral terms, using models to demonstrate effective and ineffective examples, and giving opportunities for extensive supervised practice of the skill. The author describes briefly the prerequisites for entrance into the program and details the role of the program leader. After one year of formal use, the author see significant merit for the program, although he does not offer statistical evaluation of its impact. (Author/PC)

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A TRAINING PROGRAM IN HELPING SKILLS: AN EXAMINATION OF WHAT, HOW AND IF IT WORKS

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A TRAINING PROGRAM IN HELPING SKILLS: AN EXAMINATION OF WHAT, HOW AND IF IT WORKS

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe the current status of a helping skills program entitled: Helping Skills: A Basic Training Program (New York: Behavioral Publications, 1973) which Al Hauer and I have coauthored. Readers interested in a more detailed description of the historical issues involved in the development of the Program should consult Danish (1971a), Danish (1973) and Danish and Brock (in press).

Goals of the Program

The overall goal of the Program is to train helpers in relationship building skills. In other words, the "graduate" of the Program should have skills which facilitate the development of trust and rapport between himself/herself and the helpee. Some theories of helping would see these skills as the necessary and sufficient conditions of helping (Rogers, 1957). In fact, most systematic helping skill programs have focused on these skills (Danish & Hauer, 1973; Ivey, 1971; Kagan, 1972; Carkhuff, 1969). My view is that these relationship skills are prerequisite to other categories of skills. What these additional skills are is dependent on the task(s) to be performed by the helper. For example, clearly the process by which police help tends to differ from that of the mental health counselor.

I have detailed some of the additional skills needed by mental health counselors previously (Danish, 1973). Because my own orientation has become one of seeing the counselor as a mental health and interpersonal

educator, these further skills would focus on procedures which are consistent with what has been labelled the educational model by Guerney and his colleagues (Guerney, Stollak, & Guerney, 1971).

To return to the relationship building skills used in the Helping Skills Program, six have been identified. These six are seen as among the essential relationship building skills. They are:

State I. Understanding Your Needs To Be A Helper

Stage II. Using Effective Nonverbal Behavior

Stage III. Using Effective Verbal Behavior

Stage IV. Using Effective Self Involving Behavior

Stage V. Understanding Others' Communication

Stage VI. Establishing Effective Helping Relationships

All six skills include three components involved in being a helper: (1) an understanding of oneself; (2) some knowledge of helping skills; and (3) experience in applying these skills. The first skill represents an attempt to have the trainee examine the basis for his decision to help and the needs being satisfied by helping. This is generally an area that has been ignored by users of "paraprofessionals." Helpers are people first and training only in response modes overlooks the effect the person, who is the helper, has on the helping process. The second skill emphasizes the role that nonverbal behavior plays in the helping process. Nonverbal behavior includes face and head movements, hand and arm movements, body movements and orientation, and verbal quality. The third and fourth skills involve training in verbal response modes. The response modes include not only the learning of what is generally called "empathy" but the learning of more leading responses such as questioning, advice giving

and influencing responses. Finally, self involving (confrontation) responses are taught. The learning of these verbal response modes is viewed as a different process than that of "understanding" the feelings and communication of another (Stage V). We contend that difficult skills such as responding to the feelings of others, commonly referred to as "empathy", need to be broken down into manageable learning components. Thus, the trainee is taught the structure of the various responses in Stages III and IV with their accuracy or appropriateness deemphasized. In Stage V he/she is taught to be sensitive to the behavior of others. Finally in Stage VI he/she is taught the process of integrating these components to make structurally sound responses in an accurate and appropriate manner (Danish & Brock, in press).

Generally, then, the goals are to effect changes in the individual's helping behavior. While these changes may in turn effect the helper's total behavior (his/her "personality") this is not our goal. In fact, I consider it important to help the trainee recognize that the evaluation we make of his/her performance on these skills is not an evaluation of him/her as a person.

For example, there are people I like that I would not take a trip with because they lack driving skills. Also there are people I like and have fun with that I wouldn't seek help from if I had a personal problem. In summary, the process of helping is a series of skills to be learned and there is not a one-to-one relationship between these skills and one's worth as a person.

The Process of Training

The Helping Skills Program follows a "skill learning" format. This

format is consonant with the learning of other skills, such as ballskills (Whiting, 1969), and general instructional principles (Gage, 1963; Gagne, 1970). These principles include: (1) identifying explicit behavioral objectives; (2) practice or application of skills to be learned; (3) self learning by group discussions; (4) rationale for learning (understanding of importance of certain skills); (5) sequential presentation (learning concept A before concept B); (6) active trainee participation; (7) the use of modeling; and (8) the use of immediate feedback concerning the appropriateness of trainee responses.

These instructional principles seem especially appropriate for teaching skills. Having knowledge about the skills is not enough. Effective learning involves: acquiring a conceptual understanding of the components of the skill (knowledge); viewing others demonstate the various aspects of the skill (modeling); and an opportunity to use the skill (practice). It is this combination of behaviorally defined constructs taught in a manner adapted for skill learning that makes up the Program.

More specifically the process of skill training is:

(1) The skill is defined in behavioral terms.

(2) The rationale for the skill is discussed.

(3) A skill attainment level is specified.

(4) Models are used to demonstrate both effective and ineffective examples of the skill.

(5) Opportunities for extensive supervised practice of the skill are given.

(6) Homework is assigned to assist in the generalization process.

(7) An evaluation using behavioral checklists and peer and trainer feedback is conducted to determine whether the attainment level has been achieved.

What Kind of Trainee Best Fits The Program?

Little work has been done describing an "ideal" trainee. The Program has been used to train a wide variety of professional and "paraprofessional" (human service) trainees. The groups include: professional counselors and psychologists, teachers, crisis center personnel, nurses, physicians, dentists, lawyers, police and general human service workers with bachelor degrees, A.A. degrees, high school diplomas and less. The Program could potentially be used with others desiring to be trained as helpers. The six skills are the core skills which would then be followed by additional skills more applicable to the specific settings, roles and/or functions of the trainees. The Program has also recently been adapted for use as a "training as treatment" technique. Hodgson (1974), for example, found it to be effective in helping depressed people. Horne (personal communication) reports it is being used for interpersonal skill training with elementary school students.

A few prerequisites have been identified as being necessary for the trainee to successfully complete the Program. He/she must be motivated. That is easier said than done. Often trainees examine the skills to be learned and assume they have these skills. In fact, when asked to demonstrate the skills they are unable to do so. A prerequisite somewhat similar to "motivation" is the willingness of the trainees who are already working in helping situations to unlearn some of the less effective helping behaviors they may be using. Perhaps the most important prerequisite

for training is the trainee's willingness to accept the structure and skill orientation of the Program. Trainees expecting a predominately personal growth oriented experience or an extensive opportunity to discuss issues about helping are often disappointed. The Program is designed to teach specific skills and thus emphasizes continual practice on the individual skills. Finally, the trainee needs to recognize that the learning of skills requires practice especially outside the training setting so that the skills being learned can be integrated comfortably into his behavioral repertoire. When this integration process begins the trainee is not very skilled and may feel as if he/she were dancing with two left feet. The analogy between learning to help and learning to dance is not an inappropriate one. Only with practice does helping (dancing) become natural behavior.

Leadership Prerequisites for Training[1]

A trainer's manual accompanies the Program. The manual identified the logistical requirements for leading the program as well as detailing the guidelines, rationale and strategies one might employ, and potential problems one might encounter for each stage of the Program. The manual was developed from the experiences of a number of trainers who led the Program in its formative period.

It is my experience that too little emphasis has been given to the importance of the role of trainer as a manager and leader in skill training. The focus seems to have been on the "empathy" of the leader.

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[1]It is important to note that although I posit some "ideal" characteristics, no research has yet been conducted by us on the trainer variable in helping skills.

We have found that some individuals who are well qualified in terms of helping skills are unable to lead the Program. A good trainer must be forceful, assertive, well organized, flexible, entertaining and convincing in addition to being able to model the skills taught. The importance of the entertainment value and persuasiveness of training cannot be over-emphasized. The ability of the trainer to reduce the appearance of the structure by his flexibility and humor is an important variable.

In addition, the trainer should be able to adapt the Program procedures to his own style and the needs of his group. We recommend that the trainer try to adhere to our procedures for leading the group the first time through. In this way the trainer is able to determine the general format of the Program and its strengths and weaknesses from his/her perspective. He/she is then able to alter the Program; to add procedures he/she finds useful or to delete sections inappropriate to his/her trainees. It is our belief that the Program provides a structure in which to learn a set of skills. The process detailed in the Leader's Manual should not be considered sacred.

A final leadership consideration is that leading the Program itself is a skill and as such requires practice. It is unlikely that one's first training experience will be as effective as his/her later experiences. Most trainers usually become more proficient with practice.

Utilizing the Program

The Helping Skills Program has been designed to be a 25 hour program. It is felt that this is the minimum time it takes for one to attain the level of skill required. Although at some point, the law of diminishing returns would take over, the program could be run for a somewhat longer

period of time than 25 hours with profit to the trainees. My guess is that the additional time is about 10-15 hours with most of this time being spent on Stage VI, the integration stage.

In the 25 hour time frame each stage requires approximately 2 1/2 hours except Stage III (Verbal Behavior) which involves approximately 8 hours of training. In addition there is an introductory and termination stage; the latter to conduct an evaluation of the trainee's progress, the former to provide a detailed orientation to the Program and to teach the trainee's how to give and receive feedback. The feedback exercise presents principles of feedback but uses the skill format employed in the other stages, thereby providing the trainee with a pretraining introduction to the Program's structure.

The Program is usually conducted on a one session (2 1/2 hour) per week basis to maximize generalization and practice, although trainers have varied the presentation format to meet their individual needs. For example, three consecutive 8 hour sessions have been used. With these massed training sessions, however, more training time may be needed.

As noted earlier I view this Program as one part of a systematic training package for helping personnel. Other more advanced skills have been discussed. However, even more practice in relationship skills is possible. For example, Danish (1971b) described how the Stimulus Films developed by Norm Kagan and others (1967) might be used to assist counselors to better understand how they feel in affect laden helping situations and to provide them with behavior rehearsal experiences. In Danish and Ferguson (1973) and Danish and Brodsky (1974) a similar program developed for police is described. Thus, the Program may be

effectively used as the initial stage of a comprehensive training package.

One of the ways the Program is presently being used is as an academic course taught to undergraduate students preparing for careers in human service. The three credit course has one 2 1/2 hour session and one 1 1/4 hour session weekly. During the 2 1/2 hour session, the Program is taught; during the shorter session discussion, lectures and films about helping are presented. The student is evaluated in several ways: (1) a midterm exam is given in which he/she must identify the verbal responses made on an audiotaped simulated helping interaction as well as respond to some helper statements on the audio tape with a specified verbal response; (2) establish a helping relationship with an individual of the student's own choosing but who is not a member of the class. The helping relationship must be at least three sessions. Specific questions are asked of the helper and he/she must turn in a narrative describing the relationship in terms of the questions asked; (3) the student must turn in an audiotape of one of the sessions for evaluation and; (4) a final exam involving a helping session of a specified duration with an individual unknown to them is conducted.[2]

Evaluating the Program

The long range evaluation objective is to determine whether "graduates" of the Program really help people. More specifically, do the clients of trainees change their behavior and are these changes noticeable to the clients themselves, the client's significant others and to impartial trained observers? While one would expect all training programs to be

[2]Individuals requiring information regarding the course may obtain a syllabus from the author.

interested in such measurements, few if any, research has been conducted along these lines.

It was decided to design an evaluation strategy to measure a series of questions gauging the effects of the Program. The first question, and the most basic, was do trainees learn the skills the Program was developed to teach? The process of gathering the data has been to have all students enrolled in the academic course described above, engage in a helping interaction with an individual they do not know prior to the beginning of the course, and at the conclusion of training. The helping interactions have ranged from six minutes to 20 minutes during different terms. The interactions are audiotaped. During the past year approximately 300 students have completed this task. Other information, including a biographical questionnaire and a number of standardized tests, have also been administered.

The process of taping the interactions has been useful in evaluating the effectiveness of the Program in teaching Stages III and IV which relates to learning various verbal response modes. The Helping Skills Verbal Response Scale (Danish, D'Augelli, & Brock, 1974) was developed to measure verbal responses. A summary of the responses on the scale is presented in Figure I. Primarily our initial evaluations have been directed toward assessing changes in verbal responses during an initial helping interview. An instrument has been developed to assess Stage I (Wiener & Danish, 1974) and preliminary assessments of the stage will be conducted this year. Instruments are beginning to be developed for the other stages as well and hopefully during this year, all the stages will be evaluated.

To determine whether trainees learn the verbal responses, we initially have used a pre-experimental one group pre-post design. While this design does not account for the history and maturation of the trainees, it seems to be appropriate as an initial design for several reasons. First in the course structure we employ we have been interested in course and Program evaluation - do the trainees change? A pre-post analysis answers that question especially if it is repeated over several terms. Secondly, the course structure makes finding a randomized control group nearly impossible. Thus, some design sophistication was sacrificed in order to collect the data. As noted in Table 2, the results for 140 students enrolled in the course during Winter 1973 and Spring 1974 indicate large percentage differences for a number of the responses from pre to post. Most striking is the percentage increase in continuing responses (content and affective) and the percentage decrease in closed questions and advice. The results indicate that training tends to teach trainees to reflect considerably more, respond fewer times and be less leading in the responses they make. While the data is just beginning to be analyzed, an eyeball examination seems to indicate that the differences are statistically significant from pre to post. Further, if one were to compare the Spring terms' pretest scores with the Winter terms' posttest scores significant differences on the above all seem likely. Because of the difficulty in securing a representative control group, the comparison of one term's pretest scores with another terms' posttest scores especially if repeated for several terms may be an effective means of evaluating program effectiveness.

Yet one may reasonably ask so what if trainees can demonstrate the

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skills immediately after training. Can they maintain these skill levels? And if so, do these skills relate in any way to helping. For example, what are the trainee's skill levels six months after training and if they are in helping situations are they doing any good? Both questions are important ones and, at present, unanswered. The Program is just over a year old and we have not gotten to these questions. However, during this year we expect to. I invite any of you interested in such evaluations to join us.

Summary

I have tried to describe the present status of the Helping Skills Program. My own evaluation of the Program, clearly subjective, is that at the end of a year of formal use the Program seems to have some merit. Yet research needs to be conducted to better assess its potential impact. Most importantly, however, we must recognize it as one way to train "paraprofessionals" and the enlightened consumer will examine a number of the programs and try to identify the one(s) most appropriate for his/her own needs.

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Table 1

Helping Skills Verbal Responses[3]

Response	Definition
Continuing Responses	
CONTENT	A statement which summarizes or reflects the content of the prior statement or statements.
AFFECTIVE	A statement in which the helper reflects a feeling which the helpee has not yet labelled.
Leading Responses	
CLOSED QUESTIONS	Questions that can be answered "Yes," "No," or with one or two words.
OPEN QUESTIONS	Questions that cannot be answered "Yes," "No," or with one or two words.
INFLUENCE	A statement used to change the attitudes, beliefs, and, indirectly, the behavior of the helpee.
ADVICE	A statement that provides an alternative mode of behavior (actions or thoughts) for the helpee.
Other Responses	
SELF-INVOLVING	A statement of the helper's personal response to statements made by the helpee.
SELF-DISCLOSING	A statement of factual information on the part of the helper about himself or herself.
ASIDE	A statement the helper makes to himself or herself.

[3]From Helping Skills Verbal Response Scale by S. J. Danish, A. R. D'Augelli, and G. W. Brock. Copies of this scale are available from the author.

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Table 2

Number and Percentages of Verbal Responses of Trainees Before and After Training for Two Terms During a Six Minute Helping Interaction

	RESPONSE TYPE	Winter 1973 (N=69) PRE	Winter 1973 (N=69) POST	Spring 1974 (N=71) PRE	Spring 1974 (N=71) POST
Continuing	Content	24.2% (234)	45.0% (329)	23.2% (214)	56.6% (471)
	Affective	4.9% (49)	28.2% (206)	4.6% (43)	12.6% (105)
Leading	Closed Questions	34.0% (341)	7.5% (55)	35.9% (331)	11.0% (90)
	Open Questions	5.1% (51)	7.0% (51)	11.3% (104)	9.7% (81)
	Influencing	12.5% (126)	4.5% (33)	9.7% (89)	6.1% (51)
	Advice	5.5% (55)	1.1% (8)	5.9% (54)	.3% (3)
Self Referrent	Self-Involving	11.8% (118)	6.4% (47)	6.6% (61)	2.6% (22)
	Self-Disclosure[4]	NA-	NA-	0 0	1.1% (9)
	Aside	2.1% (21)	0.3% (2)	2.4% (25)	0 0
	Total number of responses	1104	731	921	832
	Average number of responses	14.5%	10.5%	13.0%	11.7%

[4] Until Spring term the differences between self involving and self disclosure was not considered.

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